DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 970 88 RC 004 365

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TITLE Elementary Instruction, Leflore County School District, Mississippi. Reports of Consultants and Advisory Specialists under Planning Grant, Title III, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.
INSTITUTION Leflore County School District, Greenwood, Miss.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Div. of Plans and Supplementary Centers.
REPORT NO DPSC-67-4725-Vol-7
PUB DATE Jan 69
NOTE 22p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Core Curriculum, *Curriculum Development, *Disadvantaged Youth, *Elementary Grades, Field Trips, Fine Arts, Individualized Instruction, Inservice Education, *Instructional Programs, Kindergarten, Nursery Schools, Parent Education, Program Evaluation, Resource Centers, *Rural Education
IDENTIFIERS *Mississippi

ABSTRACT

The elementary school instructional program for the disadvantaged children in Leflore County, Mississippi, was examined in the subject areas of (1) reading; (2) speaking, writing, and spelling; (3) mathematics; (4) social studies; (5) science and health; (6) art; and (7) music. Some general recommendations to help meet these rural children's needs are given concerning parent education, nursery schools and public kindergartens, class size, inservice education, learning resource centers, field trips, physical facilities, individualized instruction, and curriculum development. This work was prepared under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (AN)

EDO 39970

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OE/BESE/TITLE III
DPSC-67-4725
PA 88

Leflore County School District
Mississippi

Reports of Consultants and Advisory Specialists under Planning Grant, Title III, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

Project No. 67-04725-0

Volume VII

Elementary Instruction

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January, 1969

RC004365

ED0 39970

The Elementary Instructional Program In Leflore County

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The task of education all of the children of Leflore County. Mississippi is probably one of the greatest in the United States, despite the great progress of the last fifteen years in consolidating 140 small one and two-teacher schools into 9 graded elementary school with all teachers being college graduates or above. Although equality of opportunity has been provided in building facilities, in materials of instruction, in the certification of teachers, and in class size, there is still a Heculean task, which only parent education, rich compensatory school experiences, and an extended period of home, school, and community improvement can accomplish.

The magnitude of past achievements and the difficulty of the present tasks cannot be fully appreciated. But, some of those that seem most urgent to this observer will be summarized--giving first those that cut across subject matter lines, followed by more detailed recommendations for the separate subject areas in the following order: reading, speaking, and writing, arithmetic, social studies, science and health, art, and music. Some of the general recommendations are:

1. Recognizing that the earliest and most important education takes place in the home and that the parents of the great majority of these children are educationally disadvantaged, a very comprehensive experimental parent-adult education program is an imperative.

2. Since the earliest years are the most important for education and children as early as three profit from group education, public Kindergartens for all the county's children and Nursery Schools for those whose mothers work are strongly recommended.

3. Because of the special instructional needs of most of the children, class size should be reduced at all elementary levles with the maximum number being 15 children per teacher in the kindergarten, 20 in the primary grades, and 25 in the upper grades, with one or more paid aides per room in order to give additional help to retarded children and to supply remedial teaching when first needed or at the beginning and throughout the school year.

4. Considering the previous experiences of the staff and the special needs of the children and their parents, in-service education is recommended for all teachers and superviosry personnel in the follwoing areas: how children learn and the factors affecting the learning of disadvantaged children and what methods and materials and school organizations are best suited for compensatory education. Such in-service education should not only include the usual in-service techniques but make it possible for the teachers to observe the best teaching in their region and for representative staff members to visit the best compensatory education centers in the U.S.A., especially those for children with a poor rural educational background.

5. In view of the exceedingly large number of retarded readers each school library needs a wealth of easy reading material which is on the interest level of all ages. The teachers should be encouraged to use more trade books in the classroom, not only to supplement textbooks but frequently to take the place of textbooks, especially for retarded children in grades four through six. Sufficient space and trained personnel need to be provided to extend the present libraries into Learining Resource Centers which will house adequate amounts of the best multi-sensory learning aids.

6. To meet children's need for rich first-hand experiences many well planned field trips are needed for the younger children within the community and for the older children within the local community and other nearby communities containing informational and cultural centers.

7. In many of the classrooms the movable furniture needs to be made movable and the children grouped and regrouped according to the activity of the children, with each grouping being for a specific learning purpose.

8. Display areas for exhibiting children's work, especially their creative work, should be expanded and their art work placed in open-end frames to increase the attractiveness of the halls, the library and the multi-purpose room.

9. Since these displaced rural children need many more concrete experiences even than most children, the teachers need to be encouraged and assisted in freeing themselves from their over-dependance on text books and work books which are too hard for most and often uninteresting to all. Only teachers can free themselves for such freedom requires a basic knowledge of the essentials to be taught whether the context be geography, phonics, or any other subject. It also requires a great deal of time to find suitable sources and to prepare the practice material needed. Therefore it is recommended that the teachers not only have the research assistance of librarians but that of instructional secretaries who can prepare and duplicate materials for busy teachers attempting to individualize instruction.

10. Probably the greatest need of Leflore County is for an unusually well-prepared, experienced curriculum director who can and will furnish the leadership necessary to develop an experimental but sound curriculum guide and coordinate the services of the various subject-matter supervisors, especially in their responsibility to give continuous progressive, but practical in-service training to the elementary teachers in meeting their unusually difficult teaching tasks.

Reading

The task that classroom teachers and reading specialists face in Leflore County is overwhelming. Recent tests of 4,375 children indicated that 72% of the children were either reading on first or second grade levle and only 43 children were reading at the sixth grade level. These findings have motivated a great deal of experimentation in the teaching of reading, using experimental and semi-controlled groups. One of these is the Open Court Basal Reader, another the I.P.I.(Individually Prescribed Instruction), another the Berita-Englemann, and still another the Ypslanti Follow-Up Program. All but the first of these is in its first year and entirely too new to be evaluated now, but my studied judgment would be that the Follow-Up Program has more of the potentials needed for the improvement of the reading of the disadvantaged children in Leflore County, although one of the more systematic approaches may test high, at the end of a short time, if the usual type material and limited reading skills are tested as is all too frequently the case.

In most of the rooms visited, during the reading period, there was slavish devotion to the vasal reader and its accompanying manual or to a supplementary textbook. In the first grades, only, the reading readiness material of the adopted text or experimental program was being used. Although many of the children come directly from substandard homes, without even a summer Head Start experience, there was little evidence of any attempt to build a good basic speaking and listening vocabulary before reading instruction, except as provided in the commercial material.

In view of the fact that good reading is basic to the entire educational program, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since language development is sequential and learning to read is extremely difficult for children who have not learned to listen or to talk and have very limited understanding and speaking vocabularies, a good all year kindergarten is essential for the Leflore County Schools and programs for the disadvantaged threes and fours is strongly recommended. In the absence of such enriching an compensatory experiences, first grade teachers should give a great deal of time to providing the kind of experiences most of these children have missed, even if the entire first year is needed. Furthermore, the language-experience approach to reading would seem more appropriate for the first grade than any of those in use. Many short field trips and the writing and reading of experience charts and stories should be continued into the middle grades in order to make learning to read, write and spell easier and more meaningful.

2. In order to individualize reading for such retarded, heterogeneous groups as found in seven of the schools requires that the teachers be helped through testing, home visitation, and other child study techniques to know each child's previous experiences and his personal needs, interests and abilities.

3. Finding reading materials in book form that is easy enough for the poorest readers and on their present interest level is probably one of the most difficult problems these teachers face. Therefore special effort should be made to provide for all the classrooms and in the central library 2, 5, or 10 copies of all of the better easy to read trade books and children's magazines. These library books should be used in all school subject areas for both informational reading and recreational reading and reinforce, and apply reading skills to the different subject matter areas. (see ACEI's Books for Children as a guide to the easy books available and

and the level of difficulty in each of the subject matter areas. Each classroom should be equipped with copies of several of the better trade book series, such as Cowboy Sam, The American Adventure Series, and Childhood of Famous American series. The trade books in each room should be on at least three reading levels and in some cases six or more reading levels in order to meet the needs of the children and get them interested at their own level in material that is of interest.

4. Each classroom needs copies of Weekly Reader and the Scholastic Magazine for three or more grade levels together with a copy of the state and local newspapers in order to encourage the use of reading to further the interest of even the poorest reader in current happenings seen on television.

5. It is strongly recommended that less of the regular time for reading be given to supplementary testbooks and accompanying workbooks and be used for the reading of library books in the classroom for pleasure and to supplement information in science and social studies but requiring skills unique to the subject.

6. The present emphasis on teaching phonics should not be allowed to crowd out other approaches to word recognition which are so essential to learning to read a non-phonetic language. Furthermore, the phonics skills should be taught through words already known and be applied to learning the pronounciation and meaning of words in all of the different subject matter areas.

7. Less time should be given to workbooks. Children learn to read by reading not by filling blanks and coloring pictures. Instead of assigning drill or seat work to children not working with the teacher, children should engage in various types of reading activities such as re-reading a story read in class, reading to individuals or small groups, reading orally

parts of a story or a book liked best to an indivual or small group, free reading of library books, sharing with groups parts of books read individually, listening to stories recorded by the teacher on tape or listening to excellent reading on records, recordings of poems or stories, writing and/or illustrating their own versions of a story, reading a new story silently in order to know which words to seek help from a teacher or member of a peer group. These and many other ways may be used to follow-up reading lessons or prepare for reading new materials. Throughout the entire reading period, all children should be reading, with the teacher working with individuals of different groups as their needs and interests dictate.

8. If possible each teacher should be provided with an instructional secretary for an average of one hour per day to help her communicate with parents and prepare practice material that is more highly individualized than the teacher's time will permit.

9. A teacher's aide for at least the reading and arithmetic periods would do much to give the teacher (especially in the primary grades) an opportunity to give the children the individual attention necessary and supervise group work for greater learning success and prevent practice in error which is just as harmful and is difficult to prevent when one teacher works alone with an entire class of young children.

Speaking, Writing, Spelling

Since oral language develops before written language and is used so much more frequently in life, one would expect to find it getting more attention in school. Unfortunately this is not the case in Leflore County or in schools in general. During my two days of observations, no means was observed of inproving the spoken English of children except the

grammatical errors and the mispronunciation of words in reading.

Most of the written English observed consisted of work book exercises and ditteed language drill or the copying of work on the blackboard or handwriting drill which required copying several lines of a model on the drill sheet. In a few rooms there was some creative writing displayed.

Since language is so essential to living and disadvantaged children are likely to be retarded in its use, the language arts will need to receive special attention in the schools of Leflore County. This is especially true of the seven predominantly negro schools which have so many children who come from homes where the language pattern is inferior and communication less frequent than in typical homes. Therefore the following recommendations are made:

1. Employ a language arts specialist in addition to the reading specialist, to coordiante the language arts and give assistance and in-service training to the teachers in making the language teaching less "bookish" and more meaningful and easier for the children to learn.
2. Since children can talk and write more effectively about what they know than about something in a textbook, these children should be given many first-hand experiences to broaden their limited horizon and give them things they want to talk and write about, as a means of motivating them to want to speak effectively, write legibly, and spell accurately.
3. If the language-experience approach to reading were used, if only to supplement their basal text, it would integrate the language arts in school as they are in life and make them easier for the children to learn. The experience charts, individual and class stories and story books about their experiences would increase their understanding, their speaking, their reading, and their writing vocabularies, all at the same time and

reveal the words needed for spelling.

4. The use of work books in language is questionable for any children and especially so for children with limited background. They can learn capitalization, punctuation, and other forms so much easier if the context is their own and grows out of what they know and want to say and write.

5. Since manuscript writing is easier to learn, it should be used with the younger children and probably not changed before the last half of the third grade.

6. The spelling words should be taken from an alphabetized list of the words used most frequently in children's writing, such as the Dolch list rather than columns in spelling books, teaching those the children are needing most frequently in their own writing.

7. In teaching spelling each child should be aided in using several of his senses in learning to spell. Encourage him to see the word, say the word, hear the word, write the word, check the word, and keep a record of the correct spelling in his individual spelling file for reference in writing and restudy it if written incorrectly.

Mathematics

Such evidence as was available indicated that the most dominant factor in determining the mathematics curriculum in Leflore County is the textbook, at all grade levels. The textbooks were modern, but adoption of up-to-date text and accompanying material is not sufficient, however, for a successful mathematics program, especially when children are educationally disadvantaged. Few of the rooms had a mathematical atmosphere but number lines, an abacus, and some bulletin board displays were in most of the rooms visited. Awareness of individual differences and attempts to provide for them was indicated by ability grouping and the use of differentiated drill materials. In some cases the children, who were performing on a lower level, were using a lower level book and one third grade teacher was using a second grade text for all the children.

With so few observations one is hesitant to make any suggestions for improvement:

1. Since the majority of the children are displaced rural children, emphasis should be given to mathematical content which is pertinent to their real life situations.
2. Teachers should know the mathematics they are attempting to teach well enough that they can free themselves from textbooks and substitute real life problems with which the children are familiar. Children having trouble reading and understanding problems may be permitted to work their own quantative problems. Another approach is for the class and/or the teacher to make up the problems and have them duplicated for use in lieu of irrelevent textbook material; especially when introducing a new process. Using several textbooks and selecting and duplicating only those problems that have meaning for the children is another possible approach. Using familiar content makes mathematics easier, increases motivation, and enhances the self-concept of disadvantaged and retarded children.

3. The drill material used should be carefully selected to fit individual needs and should be accompanied with a great deal of individual attention to prevent practice in error which is as positive as practicing the correct forms. This should not be used as busy work. (For example, in one room ten children were observed who were so charmed with coloring the wrong number of objects.) All drill material, whether practice cards or sheets, workbooks or programmed materials, should be carefully selected in terms of readiness and need and should be self-checking, with provisions for each child to work at his own pace.

4. Since experience shows that disadvantaged children need specific training in perceiving time, space and size relationships, and in learning words and phrases which describe them, a great deal of direct experience should be provided for handling and using materials before learning to identify, name, compare, and differentiate abstract characteristics.

5. The Leflore County teachers who have so many of the disadvantaged children need to be provided with aides and semi-professionals to help them work with small groups and with individuals, especially those needing a one-to-one relationship. If money is not available, the help of volunteers should be sought. Care should be taken, however, that such aides are warm, friendly persons, who can emotionally accept all types of children and make them feel wanted and experience success in keeping with their performance ability.

6. Since disadvantaged children are more adept in solving concrete than abstract problems, they should be provided with an abundance of first-hand experiences and well selected structural learning materials, so organized as to facilitate sequential learning and free experimental use as individuals or in small groups.

7. At every learning level, special attention should be given to arithmetic readiness and need in presenting new processes.

Social Studies

The social studies curriculum of Leflore County seems to be based on the expanding environment concept. Pupils in the primary grades seemed to be studying about their home, school and neighborhood or county and the intermediate grades seemed to be studying about the state, nation or world, but with minor attention to the people of Asia and Africa.

Most of the work observed in social studies, during my brief visit, consisted of reading the textbooks and talking about the content...one division at a time. In some cases the textbook was read aloud by the children and questions asked at the close of each child's reading. In another room, children were filling out blanks in workbooks.

The vocabulary was too difficult for many of the children and the content was not very closely related to their life experiences. There was little attempt to relate the facts being taught to the children's past learnings or to present day happenings and little evidence of teacher-pupil planning or the use of the available media and materials to enrich and make their learnings more meaningful and lasting. In one case, the teacher gave some time to teaching map and globe skills and another showed a related film. In two of the rooms visited, there was evidence of a social studies unit, but they were both in the two predominantly white schools.

In the light of my very limited observations the following recommendations are made for improving the social studies learning experiences

of the Leflore County children:

1. Make the rooms more attractive and functional with bulletin boards, charts, maps, interest centers, etc. which reflect the interest and work of the children in connection with their social studies.

2. Give the children an opportunity to learn the principles of democracy by involving them in planning what they are going to do, how they are going to do it, and in evaluating how well it has been done - - with the teacher and the pupils respecting each child's contribution.

3. Provide each classroom with a more adequate supply of maps and globes and other basic reference material, much of which should be on an easy reading level.

4. Provide many concrete experiences which focus on the problems of living in both a changed rural and the more complex urban environment in which the children are living today.

5. Guide and encourage groups and individuals, each on his own level and circumstances, to use the radio, television, newspapers, magazines and family discussion, or through whatever means is available at school or in their frequently impoverished homes, to keep up with significant current happenings that affect the lives of people - desirably and undesirably. Even very young children have some experiences which help aoorecuate the effects of the proposed federal trucking bill, water pollution, or an epidemic of a contagious disease if discussed on their level, as in the Weekly Reader and the Scholastic Magazine series.

6. Make greater use of authentic, up-to-date, easily read social studies library books to take the place of or to supplement difficult and often uninteresting textbook materials. Make the role played by Negro Americans and other minority groups a regular part of the social studies program.

7. Resource people should be brought in frequently to help them get to know all types of people and the contributions all workers make to our daily living. It is especially important to bring in Negro males whose values boys might accept and copy because so many of these children live in a maternalistic society in whihc fathers do not accept their responsibility to their family or their community.

8. Employ a full-time trained librarizn for each school who knows children and their best books, who will continue to build a more adequate library for each school and who will expand the library into a Learning Resource Center by adding models, objects, pictures, films, film strips, records, tape recordings, projection equipment, and other multi-sensory aids which can be checked out for calss or individual use.

9. Give children an opportunity to participate in a variety of related activities that encourage children to solve problems, to find out and to express factually and creatively something interesting they have learned in the area being studied.

10. Field trips, and the use of resource people and many direct experiences are imperative for correcting and broadening the understandings and social concepts of most of the Leflore County children because of the recent dramatic change in their environment and way of life. A liberal policy for the use of school buses for field trips for the older children will have to be established and all the teachers encouraged and aided in planing for this broadening of the school environment. Fortunately Leflore County is rich in historical and geographic resources and recent industrialization has increased the number of trained resource persons within a short radius of each of the nine schools. Special effort should be made to involve parents from all economic levels and dignity be given to all types of work and services, including adult education.

Science and Health

The elementary school science curriculum was almost non-existant in most of the elementary rooms observed, with one exception -- the new school - which has provided a science laboratory for the elementary school. Even there the science curriculum seemed to conform to the topics in the adopted text. Too much reliance is placed upon reading and answering questions about subjects in the textbook, although all of them are housed in modern school buildings and "There are a hundred thousand whys in a trip around a modern building". A few rooms had small collections of plant or animal life which indicated that there had been some opportunity for first-hand observation and class discussion and probably research or experimentation.

The lunch programs were well planned, appetizing and nutritious, and early morning snacks were provided but there was no observation of their use to help children understand their own nutritional needs of the importance of sanitary handling of food.

It was felt that over-crowded classrooms and inadequate facilities and materials accounted in part for the crowdingout of science learning. Other factors may have been the teacher's lack of training and general feeling of insecurity in guiding scientific experiments and demonstrating scientific principles as applied to the everyday experiences of living in a modern world. Although all of the elementary teachers in Leflore County hold a bachelors degree or better, science education may have been the most limited area in the academic background of many of these teachers. Furthermore, having gone to one and two-room schools, they probably did not have science there.

Even though observations were casual and limited, the following recommendations seem justified:

1. Require the teachers at all levels to include some science in their daily curriculum.

2. An in-service program, which involves all teachers, supervisors, and elementary principals, should be planned, with special attention being given to science.

3. Efforts should be made to provide space and simple science equipment in each room, to encourage the children to experiment in growing things, and in various types of finding out activities - much of such equipment can be secured from the dime store, the kitchen, the garage, and in the local environment.

4. Since the majority of these children come from underprivileged homes, the science of healthful living should be emphasized, with special attention being given to instruction in the care of eyes and teeth, nutritional requirements, symptoms of common diseases and the need for personal cleanliness. Much of this can grow out of or be n integral part of the daily routine of toileting, eating, resting, health inspection, and medical and dental examinations.

5. There should be follow-up work to interpret the results of dental and physical examinations to all parents and help them seek medical advice and correction of defects, utilizing all available community services, including volunteers who transport children whose parents are both working or who lack transportation facilities.

Art

Art experiences were very meager in the rooms in which spot checks were made. In one of the upper grades, the newly elected art supervisor was responsible for a semi-creative art experience observed. The bulletin boards were teacher-made and there were few materials in the classrooms to stimulate children to express, to make, or to adorn that which they made. Although the classrooms, for the most part, were clean and fairly recently painted in pleasing pastel shades, the walls and hallways were barren of children's creative work and of real works of art.

Art experiences are an essential part of all elementary school programs and they are especially needed for the Leflore County Schools because a disproportionate number of children come from dull, drab homes that are practically lacking in beauty, within and without. Furthermore there are few cultural centers within a forty-mile radius.

In the light of the sketchy observation possible in the two-day period, the following recommendations are made:

1. Give special attention to helping children see, appreciate and help to preserve and improve the natural beauty which abounds in that area.
2. Encourage the children to make their own classrooms, hallways and school grounds more attractive through projects of beautification and conservation in which the entire school, including even the Kindergarten have the opportunity of participating. Parents and local clubs may be interested in contributing seeds, bulbs, plants, material or special "know-how" and services.
3. Get the metropolitan government or cultural centers to remove entrance fees for all children who are accompanied by their parents or teacher.

4. Provide equipment and all types of art media for the use of all elementary teachers, together with space for varied art activities in each room or in a multi-purpose room or other available center. Those requiring most room are the sink, work table, work bench, easles, simple but good construction tools, varied art media, including those that may be gotten from the homes or collected from businesses or industry.

5. Instead of teaching the children for a short period at infrequent periods, the art supervision should devote the major portion of his time to helping the teachers teach their own art--not as a subject but as a way of life throughout the school day. This will require a change in philosophy on the part of the teachers and the supervisor.

6. Many of the teachers will need in-service training in how to encourage and release the creativity which is a part of the heritage of every child, versus using coloring books, tracing patterns or copying models which stifle creativity. The teachers will need training and re-training which will make them at home in the use of varied art media and the processes that children need to use in order to express their ideas and imagination in some tangible form. Such education will require studio type teachers meetings for all of the elementary teachers and additional college training for many.

7. The halls and classrooms should be used extensively to display all of the children's art products and a few masterpieces should be exhibited in offices, classrooms, lunchrooms, and library, with provisions for changing the pictures at frequent periods. Some community centers are glad to cooperate in exhibiting children's creative work, especially on special days or for special events.

Music

Although music was a facority subject with a large majority of the children questioned, with the exception of role singing, listening to records and the availability of music textbooks, there was little evidence of music being taught in the elementary rooms visited. This lack is serious not only for the enjoyment and cultural enrichment of the children but for its potential salutory effect upon learning to read which is a very serious deficiency at all grade levels.

This seeming lack of wide rich musical experiences may in part be due to certain factors noted, namely - the great amount of the school day given to reading instruction, the lack of adequate materials for music instruction, the lack of musical training and competency on the part of the classroom teachers, and the fact that there was no special teacher of music or music supervisor on the central staff to encourage and aid the teachers in teaching all the types of music which children are so ready and eager to learn on their own developmental levels.

To rapidly improve existing conditions the following suggestions are submitted:-

1. Employ a well prepared music supervisor who knows good music, the interests and abilities of children, and how to teach music to both children and adults.
2. During the first year the music supervisor should give a major portion of her time to increasing the cimpetence and confidence of the elementary teachers and to making readily available, in the classrooms or in a central depository, the materials needed to insure a greatly expanded music program at every grade level.
3. Next summer or at some time during the school year, at least one teacher from each grade in each school should be selected for intensive

in-service music education to serve as a resource person who will help the other teachers in his or her school. The assistance of music specialists in a nearby college should be asked to participate in the Music Workshop.

4. One of the outgrowths of this training should be a well-palnned, sequential, balanced curriculum to guide the classroom teachers in providing musical experiences both for their own sakes and to enrich and unify the learnings in cultural units in the social studies and language arts.

5. Beginning at the fourth grade level, special teachers should be employed to teach band, orchestra and vocal music and to assist the primary teachers in these areas. Participation in band and orchestra should be broadened by provisions of free or low-rental instruments to children. Interested citizens and civic organizations in the community might be encouraged to provide instruments and in some cases financial support for private lessons for talented children whose parents cannot afford the expense.

6. If funds can be secured, the basic materials for teaching a well-rounded program of music should be made readily available for the use of each elementary teacher in order that music may be made an integral part of each child's day. These would include enough copies of two carefully selected music books that at least one might be placed in the hands of every other child. In addition to the two sets, the classroom teacher should have one copy of several of the very best collections of children's songs, in order to select those appropriate for a given situation and to broaden children's repertoire of songs "too good to miss" which they will enjoy singing and soon make their own through joyous repetition. Percussion instruments, with good tonal qualities for the

younger children, and xylophones, auto harps, recorders and other simple musical instruments should be provided for the upper grades. All grades should have in the classroom special collection of excellent, appropriate records and each classroom should be able to check out others from the school's central Learning Resources Laboratory, just as they check out library books.